

'There's no easing in'

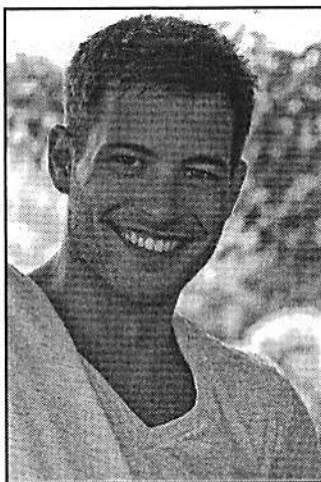
Duxbury native in national tour of *West Side Story*

By R. Scott Reedy
Correspondent

It was probably just as well that dancer and Duxbury resident Kyle Robinson didn't recognize everyone at the audition table last summer in New York when he tried out for a part in the national tour of *West Side Story*.

"I decided to sing 'Jet Song,' and by the end of the number, my voice cracked. I don't know why, but I just started belly laughing. Before long, the creative team, the producers and everyone else was laughing, too, although I'm not sure if it was with me or at me," Robinson said last week by telephone from a Rochester, N.Y., tour stop. "There was an older man at the table, too. I had no idea who he was, but he started laughing, too."

That mystery man turned out to be none other than the legendary Arthur Laurents, the writer and director behind not only *West Side Story* but also *Gypsy* and the screenplays for films including *The Snake Pit*, *The Way We Were* and *The Turning Point*. He had directed the 2009 revival of *West Side Story* and was assisting Tour Director David Saint in casting the road company. Laurents, who passed away just last month at age 94, was known to be a not-always-easy-to-please, free-with-his-opinions task master. Laurents must also have appreciated a good laugh, however, because Robinson was ultimately cast as Diesel in the national tour of *West Side Story*, which opens at Boston's



Kyle Robinson

Colonial Theatre next week. By the time Robinson and Laurents crossed paths again, the young performer knew exactly who he was facing.

"Arthur came to see the show in Detroit, which was one of the early stops on the tour," he said. "I knew all about him by then, but I don't remember being particularly nervous. He was pretty docile and seemed content to watch David Saint work with us. After the rehearsal, we were getting notes and Arthur told us, 'That's the best 'Gee, Officer Krupke' I have ever seen.' To have Arthur Laurents pay us that kind of compliment was amazing. I will never forget it."

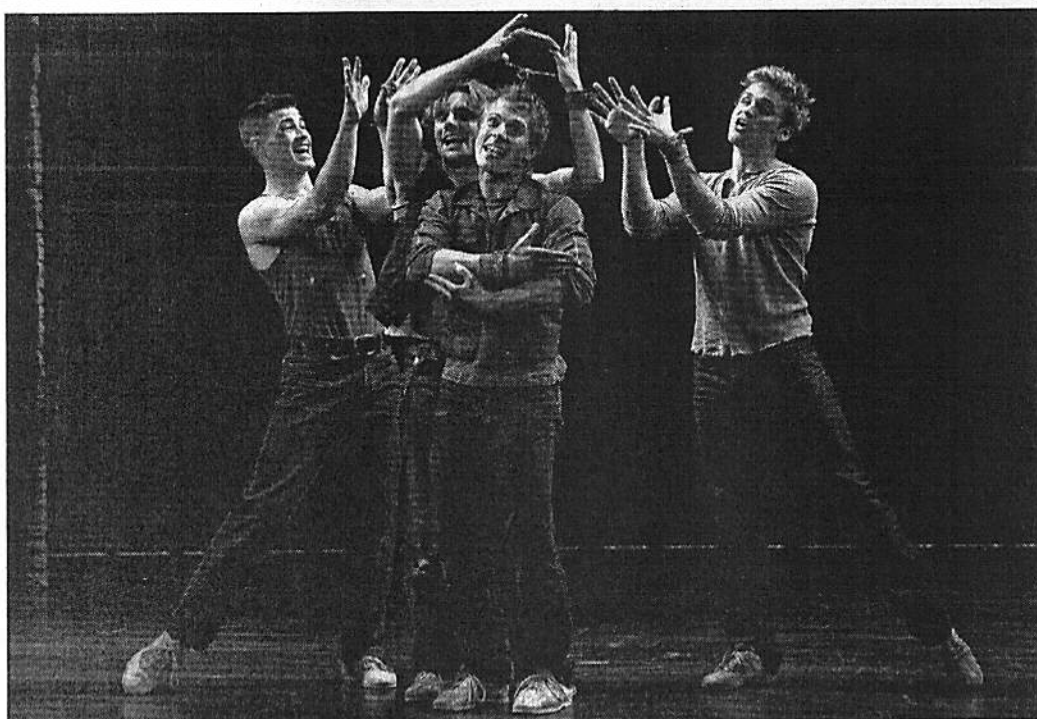
The modern-day adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* has been proving itself unforgettable, too, for over 50 years. Originally conceived by choreographer Jerome Robbins as a story set on New York's Lower East Side with tensions flaring between Jews and Catholics between Easter and Passover, years later the conflict was switched from religion to race at the suggestion of Laurents. The show now depicts the con-

flict between two teenaged street gangs, the Puerto Rican Sharks and the working-class white Jets. With book by Laurents, direction and choreography by Robbins, a score by Leonard Bernstein and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, *West Side Story* opened at Broadway's Winter Garden Theatre Sept. 26, 1957.

For Robinson, who attended Braintree's Thayer Academy and is a 2005 graduate of Duxbury High School and won early acclaim as a performer while studying dance at Sherry Gold Studios in Brockton, the show represents a chance to do something he has loved since childhood.

"I've known that dance was what I truly loved since I was 15. It has been my real passion since high school," Robinson, who graduated from New York's prestigious Juilliard School in 2009, said. "At Gold, I won many titles in competition dance in everything from tap, jazz, ballet and modern to hip hop. After Juilliard, I saw myself going with a modern dance company. I didn't imagine myself doing a Broadway show. Then I heard about *West Side Story* and the opportunity to do Jerome Robbins's choreography, which has been just phenomenal. I love the movement and the explosiveness in this show; it is masterful. Robbins is a genius, and his choreography pairs beautifully with Bernstein's score."

Whether it's "Something's Coming," "Tonight," "America," "I Feel Pretty," or "Somewhere," everyone has a favorite song from the landmark score of "West Side Story." For Robinson, a winner of the National Foundation for Advancement in the



The National Tour of West Side Story. Duxbury's Kyle Robinson is on the far left.

PHOTO/JOAN MARCUS

Arts Award, his favorite moments are all about dance.

"Gee, Officer Krupke' is my favorite number to do, but 'Cool' is my favorite number from the show," he said. "There's no easing in; it's just go, go, go."

The pace will be similar while Robinson is at home with his parents, Melbourne and Kerri Robinson, over the next few weeks. His sister, Haley, 18, and brother, Eoin, 15, will be home, too, and then there'll be those eight shows a week at the Colonial. Robinson says he still plans to find time to fit in a few of his favorite Duxbury traditions.

"The Duxbury House of Pizza is to die for; it's my second kitchen when I'm home," he said. "I'll probably be there at least a few times for the Italian with everything, including hots, which is my favorite. And, even though it is not legally condoned, I'm planning to do some jumping off Blue Fish Bridge, too. My home now is a suitcase, but my bed in my room in Duxbury is my real home."

West Side Story will be at the Colonial Theatre, 106 Boylston St., Boston, June 14 through July 9. For tickets and information, visit the box office, call 1-800-

982-2787 or go online at BroadwayAcrossAmerica.com/Boston.